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Abbé Paul Boulin (1875-1933)

(pseudonyms: R. Duguet and I. de Récalde), a writer from Troyes with a strange history

Lucien Ceyssens

Years ago, while I was a student in Rome preparing my thesis on Jansenism, I purchased, at a sale of duplicates from the Gregorian Library, a batch of French pamphlets in duodecimo by a certain I. de Récalde, published in Paris, most of them by the *Librairie moderne*. At first glance these booklets seemed to have some connection with Jansenism and anti-Jansenism, subjects which even then I believed to be inseparable. The author I. de Récalde, however, was unknown to me; I soon learned from people around me that he was probably one of those ill-intentioned historians who first come to glean material around the Vatican and then attack it. In short, my pamphlets remained on my shelves[1] until, around 1978, I began to work on the bull *Unigenitus* and its promoters, among whom Fr. Le Tellier, confessor to Louis XIV, was one of the chief figures.[2] It was then, intrigued by so important an instigator, that I remembered my Récalde pamphlets, among which was indeed *Abbé de Margon, Lettre sur le confessorat du P. Le Tellier avec une Introduction et des Notes sur la Politique des Jésuites et l'Oratoire*, by I. de Récalde, Paris, 1922. From this came my anecdotal study: *Autour de la bulle Unigenitus. L'abbé Guillaume de Margon († 1760), "agent secret du P. Le Tellier"*, in *Lias* 10 (1983), 137-163.

From there, too, my curiosity focused still more on I. de Récalde himself, an unknown author of poor reputation, but a writer of substance. From the *Catalogue imprimé de la Bibliothèque nationale de Paris*, vol. 147, p. 596, I soon learned that he was a certain Abbé Paul Boulin of the Diocese of Troyes. I then received valuable information from that city. Miss F. Bibolet, chief curator of the Municipal Library and the Old Archives, kindly supplied me, on 2 October 1982, with several useful addresses and a short biographical notice taken from Alfred Morin, *Saint-Pouange*, p. 57:

> "Paul-Émile Boulin, parish priest of Saint-Pouange from 1913 to 1919, formerly head of the boarding department at the École Bossuet in Paris, formerly a director at *L'Univers*, author, under the pseudonym Roger Duguet, of several novels, of a study on Simart, etc. … died at Moussey (Aube), where he had retired, on 4 July 1933."

[1] This does not mean that my curiosity had not led me to glean something from them. For the particular interest of the time, when Fr. Abbate, a Conventual, and Tachi-Venturi, a Jesuit, were debating the pontificate of Clement XIV and the suppression of the Society of Jesus, I opened my first booklet: *Clément XIV. Le bref "Dominus ac redemptor", portant suppression de la Compagnie de Jésus, avec une introduction et des notes par I. de Récalde*, Paris, 1920, 135 pp. The occasion of Bellarmine's canonization, which surprised even those around the Vatican, led me to read the very interesting autobiography of the new saint in *Un saint jésuite. La cause du Vénérable Bellarmin: l'autobiographie, Votum de Passionei, lettre à Clément VIII avec une introduction et notes*, by I. de Récalde, Paris, 1923, 261 pp. I must admit that this autobiography of Bellarmine remained in my mind until the recent Congress on Augustinianism at Louvain, where I dealt with Bellarmine at Louvain, and with Bellarmine and the first condemned proposition of Baius; see *L'Augustinisme à l'ancienne Faculté de théologie de Louvain*, edited by M. Lamberigts, Louvain, 1994.

[2] See L. Ceyssens - J.A.G. Tans, *Autour de l'Unigenitus. Recherches sur la genèse de la Constitution*, Louvain, 1987, where Le Tellier is discussed on pp. 403-455.

I had already made considerable progress, but S. de Moreau, chancellor of the Bishopric of Troyes, provided me with still more information. A member of the *Société archéologique de l'Aube*, he himself had studied, toward the end of the 1960s, the large Boulin file preserved in the diocesan archives, and had spoken more than once at meetings of his Society about this little-known man of Troyes, without, however, proceeding to publication. He was kind enough - for which I thank him warmly - to obtain for me the typed text of two of his communications.[3] It is chiefly from them that, without repeatedly indicating the fact, I draw many details in this short biographical notice.

We should also note that M. de Moreau, in addition to the Boulin file in the episcopal archives, had been able to consult a niece of Abbé Boulin, who had also been his goddaughter and, for a time, his secretary. From her, Moreau was able to obtain "information … making it possible to enter more deeply into the knowledge of this rich personality who, despite constantly failing health, displayed considerable literary activity in every genre …".

Seminarian

Paul-Émile Boulin (1875-1933) was born at Arcis-sur-Aube, a small village near the city of Troyes, even incorporated into it since then. His parents were undoubtedly very Catholic and of modest origin.

After his humanities, probably completed in Troyes itself, Paul entered the seminary, where, on the whole, he was judged favorably:

Character: very good. Proud. Original;
Piety: (no remark);
Conduct: good;
Talents: above the ordinary;
Application: inconsistent;
Preaching: very good if he takes the trouble;
Singing: weak;
Ceremonies: weak;
Health: weak.

His vocation as a writer revealed itself from then on. "While still a seminarian, at the age of twenty-two, he received from the *Société académique de l'Aube* a vermeil medal and a prize of 50 francs for a study on *L'Art troyen au XVIIe siècle*; and in the same year he published in *Les Contemporains* a biography of Simart,[4] under the pseudonym Roger Duguet,[5] which he would use from then on. On 24 June 1898, before reaching the age of twenty-three, he was ordained a priest."

[3]Here are the titles: *Un curé de l'Aube polémiste et romancier: l'abbé Paul Boulin (1875-1933)*, 8 typed pages, a paper read at a meeting of the *Société académique de l'Aube* on 18 December 1970; *L'abbé Paul Boulin romancier champenois*, a four-page summary, read at a later meeting. On 20 October 1981 M. de Moreau wrote to me: "… I was planning another study on his zeal as a Parisian journalist, but for lack of time I had to give it up."

[4]Pierre-Charles Simart, a man of Troyes, 1806-1857, renowned sculptor; the relevant encyclopedias discuss him.

[5]This pseudonym seems to have been borrowed from Jacques Joseph Duguet (1649-1733), an Oratorian and very well-known writer regarded as a Jansenist; for a time he taught philosophy at Troyes. See *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, IV, 1858-1859. The *Dictionnaire de spiritualité*, IV, 1759-1769, calls him one of the best French writers on spirituality.

Parish Priest

In July he was appointed parish priest at Faux-Villecerf (Aube, arrondissement of Nogent-sur-Seine, canton of Marcilly-le-Hayer, 270 inhabitants), of which he seems to have retained unfavorable memories. In any case, he would later set his novel *Pauvre paroisse* there. But there he was also the neighbor of the distinguished parish priest of Mesnil-Saint-Loup, thirty years his senior, who exercised a profound influence on him:

> "… There is no doubt that the advice of the veteran, who had taken care of his flock … helped to imprint deeply on the malleable mind of the young priest … love of the Church and therefore of Rome, guarantor of its unity; concern for doctrinal firmness; refusal of concessions to deviations and opportunistic accommodations; all tendencies that he would be happy to find again and to serve under the great pope Saint Pius X, engaged in combat with the Modernist heresy …".

On 25 August 1901, Boulin was transferred to another very nearby parish, but a somewhat more important one (Valladin, arrondissement of Nogent-sur-Seine, canton of Marcilly-le-Hayer, 413 inhabitants). He remained there only one year and prepared himself for "another apostolate more in keeping with his abilities and tastes …".

At the beginning of the school year in October 1902, he was in Paris as "division director at the École Bossuet, a day school for secondary-school pupils, on rue du Luxembourg, now rue Guynemer".

But, for reasons unknown, four years later we find him parish priest of the very modest and distant village of Villotran (Oise, arrondissement of Beauvais, canton of Auneuil, 187 inhabitants).

Novelist

At Villotran, Paulin would remain only two years (1906-1908), but there he asserted his literary talents. In 1908 he published in *Le Pays de France*, in the regional writers' collection, under the pseudonym Roger Duguet, *La Folie-Mauroy, roman champenois*, Paris, n.d. (1907), in-18, 179 pp. In it he develops a theme close to his heart: the crucial role of women in the evolution of society, both for evil and for good (the subject of a subsequent volume). He often mingles into it "a touch of irony, which gives it a distinctly Champagne flavor, but at times sharp and unexpected claw-strokes appear, betraying the author's combative temperament. By contrast, one appreciates all the more the soothing serenity that emerges from certain poetic descriptions."

The novel received from the *Société académique de l'Aube* the prize for regional writers. It also drew favorable reviews, even from *La Croix*, which nevertheless quoted "audacious" passages. Later, however, around 1912, during the more general attack on Paul, *La Libre Parole* of 8 July 1912 found the book "scabrous and of unhealthy writing." Indeed, in *L'Univers* of 9 July 1912, the author would acknowledge in his novel "pages that are too vivid," adding: "I would no longer write this little book today."

During his brief stay at Villotran, Paul prepared two other novels: *Après l'option*, illustrations by Rousseau, n.d. (1908), in-8, 97 pages, which is more moderate, and *Pauvre paroisse*, Paris, n.d. (1909), in-16, 243 pp., an autobiographical novel.

Journalist

These publications, which are not without literary merit, were noticed even in Paris, where Paul reappeared by the end of 1908. There he made his official debut in journalism, first as editorial

secretary of the *Dimanches littéraires*, then as an editor at *L'Univers*. Here, perhaps without knowing it - or without knowing it well enough - Paul entered the Parisian hornet's nest. Convinced Catholics, but of differing political, religious, social, and other tendencies, fought one another openly or quietly: liberal Catholics against integralist Catholics; Modernists against anti-Modernists (the latter enjoying the full support of Pius X); Ultramontanes against Gallicans. We cannot go into detail, but gladly refer the reader to Émile Poulat's very instructive work, *Intégrisme et catholicisme intégral. Un réseau international antimoderniste: La "Sapinière" (1909-1912)*, Paris, Casterman, 1969.

The famous newspaper *L'Avenir* had been launched by Lamennais, the liberal Catholic, but after numerous incidents it was directed by Louis Veuillot, the fiery Ultramontane, bitter opponent of Montalembert, the liberal Catholic whom he continually fought. After Louis Veuillot's death, under his brother Eugène and especially under his son François, a fervent supporter of integral Catholicism, *L'Univers* began to falter.

Paul, now secretary-general, felt the effects; his task became crushing. He wrote on 10 December 1909:

> "… I am left almost alone at *L'Univers*, and what I sign is almost nothing compared with what I write, and what I write compared with the copy I have to put into shape … You must have followed our rather rapid evolution at *L'Univers*. Do not think that it was spontaneous … The new pontifical directives are very clear, and Rome is determined to go all the way against Modernism. One must be Catholic all the way against Modernism, liberalism. Quite unexpectedly, I assure you, I find myself engaged in this fight, and I am playing a role in it that I would not have foreseen six months ago. It is far too large, I know, for my shoulders, which risk suffering from it."

Certainly Paul, as he would later declare, "had powerful support in Rome, and in Rome powerful enemies." Among the latter, even in Paris, he had to count Léon-Adolphe Amette (1850-1920), archbishop (1906) and cardinal (1911). *L'Avenir* was finally purchased in 1912 by a group of Catholics associated with the *Action française*.

Paul was attached first to the weekly *La Vigie*, an "integral Roman Catholic organ," and then to *La Sapinière*, of the same tendency and even more intransigent, which, despite support and even subsidies from Rome, failed to take hold. To put an end to it, Amette asked the Bishop of Troyes to recall his priest.[6] The bishop accordingly appointed Paul parish priest of a tiny, remote parish, Saint-Pouange (Aube, arrondissement of Troyes, canton of Bouilly). Obediently, Paul went there with his mother and his niece.[7] But he still engaged, on a smaller scale, in journalism.

He received old friends at his rectory. Msgr. Benigni,[8] an intimate collaborator of Pope Pius X, was at times a welcome guest there. When, in July 1914, the bishop, in order to neutralize him further, wanted, against his wishes, to move him to another, somewhat more important parish (Savières,

[6] Amette regarded *La Vigie* as one of the three scourges of his diocese. See the encyclopedia *Catholicisme*, I, 449-450.

[7] At first Paul drew his bishop's attention to "the considerable repercussions that the intervention of His Eminence Cardinal Amette will have in the press and in public opinion; he has too widely spread the claim - I have the proof in my hands - that the move was aimed at the execution of an integral Roman Catholic writer and at the disappearance of a new organ with which he collaborated … I have nothing left but to entrust myself to the justice and benevolence of Your Excellency …". When the bishop maintained his decision, Paul wrote: "I was relegated there; there I am."

[8] Umberto Benigni (1862-1934), journalist and prolific publicist. See a notice in É. Poulat's work already cited, *Intégrisme et catholicisme intégral*, Paris, 1969, pp. 61-62.

Aube, arrondissement of Arcis-sur-Aube, canton of Méry-sur-Seine, 659 inhabitants), Paul displayed only a virile obedience:

> "… Since Your Excellency is pleased to remind me, perhaps somewhat harshly, that I belong to the diocese, I do not think it indiscreet to remind you that, in reality, every day I make, for this honor, the hardest sacrifices of every kind … It goes without saying, moreover, that if what was really involved were not an offer but an order, Your Excellency would not once again have a more submissive son. After begging you not to impose this new trial on me, my first impulse would be to obey you, without even wishing to consider the most respectful legal means of escaping your will …".

But then came the World War. Despite his poor health, Paul was called up for the army and assigned to auxiliary service. For an unknown reason, however, a search was ordered at his home, and he was transferred from auxiliary service to active duty.

After the war, in September 1919, he was appointed a professor at the Municipal College of Troyes. But in the summer of 1920, after the sudden death of Cardinal Amette, he was able to return to Paris. In February 1921 he founded there a twice-monthly review, *L'Actualité catholique*, which enjoyed the support of Cardinal Dubois, Amette's successor. This time, however, if Paris supported him, Rome disavowed him. Pius X, his protector, was gone, and so was his policy. Already on the following 2 June, Paul had to announce the cessation of his review "at the desire of the Holy See."

Historian

Idle in Paris, a victim of contemporary history, Paul - parish priest, novelist, journalist - made himself a historian under the pseudonym I. de Récalde. Was the "Abbé Récalde" who, in the eighteenth century, dealt with the history of hospitals, a man of Troyes? For ten years (1920-1930), I. de Récalde plunged into the history of the Jesuits. This is surprising, for until then Paul had seemed rather an admirer and collaborator of that powerful religious order.

In the introduction to his *Margon*,[9] Paul wrote:

> "To tell the truth, we lived for a long time too close to the Jesuits, or even too deeply mixed with their ranks, to admit at first their failings, to which our sympathies made us blind. Yet a series of contemporary incidents gradually opened our eyes … And it was under the disillusioned gaze produced by this cruel experience of contemporary life that, in turn, one by one, during the course of our research, certain more or less significant features of the past passed or repassed before us. Suddenly the meaning of certain permanent realities, acquired through this harsh apprenticeship, illuminated for us some corner of the archives that until then had remained unnoticed or obscure; or the reading of an old author brought us face to face again with a new situation, the one shedding light on the other. It was through the chance of these encounters that our pamphlets were born … Circumstances and the force of events have done almost everything …".

Indeed, Paul carried out, or had carried out, research as far as the Vatican Archives and Library.[10]

[9] See below. We devoted a short study to this enigmatic author: *Autour de la bulle Unigenitus. L'abbé Guillaume de Margon († 1760), "agent secret du P. Le Tellier"*, in *Lias* (Groningen), 10 (1983), 132-169.

[10] In *Les jésuites sous Aquaviva* (see below), Paul mentions research carried out in the Borghese collection at the Vatican and cites several documents from the Spanish Nunciature originating in that Borghese collection. Naturally, Paul also knew and used historians unfavorable to the Jesuits, including the former Jesuit M. Mir, whose *Historia*

He readily produced official and authentic documents. He hated partisan history, especially when it claimed to be impartial. He attacked the volumes - especially the fourth - of Jean Guiraud,[11] *Histoire partiale; histoire vraie* (1910-1917), so highly praised and reprinted; those of von Pastor, *Geschichte der Päpste*, modern period;[12] those of Mourret,[13] *Histoire de l'Église*; but above all those of Jesuit historians, the Crétineau-Jolys, the Bruckers, the Tachi-Venturis,[14] etc.

In 1920, then, Paul began the series of his historical pamphlets. Here they are, insofar as I possess them or have been able to obtain information about them. They were all published under the pseudonym I. de Récalde and printed in Paris by the *Librairie moderne*, in duodecimo, often without a date, so that the chronological order we follow is not entirely certain.

- *Le message du Sacré-Cœur à Louis XIV et le P. de la Chaize*, (1920), 126 pp.
- *Écrits des Curés de Paris contre la politique et la morale des jésuites (1658-1659) avec une étude sur la querelle du laxisme*, 1921, 305 pp.
- *Abbé de Margon, Lettres sur le confessorat du P. Le Tellier, avec une introduction, des notes sur la politique des jésuites et l'Oratoire*, 1922, 310 pp.; reprinted in 1928.
- *Histoire intérieure de la Compagnie de Jésus d'après les documents … du récent ouvrage espagnol de Don Miguel Mir, Tome I, Les principes*, (1922), 579 pp.
- *Une victime des jésuites. Saint Joseph Calasanz. Le P. Pietrasanta S.J. contre les Écoles Pies, d'après le chanoine Timon-David*, 1922, 168 pp.
- *Histoire jésuite. Histoire vraie. I. À propos du bref "Dominus ac Redemptor" et la querelle des Rites*, 1924, 136 pp.
- *La cause du Vénérable Bellarmin: l'autobiographie, Votum de Passionei, Lettre à Clément VIII, avec une introduction et des notes*, 1923, 264 pp.
- *Un scandale jésuite: l'initiation sexuelle d'après une brochure de l'Action populaire: Faut-il parler? Que dire? Comment le dire? Simples notes à l'usage des parents et des éducateurs par un père de la Compagnie de Jésus*, 1924, 100 pp.
- *Benoît XIV: Bulles "Immensa pastorum" et "Ex quo singulari" contre la Compagnie de Jésus pour l'affranchissement des Indiens de Paraguay et la condamnation des Rites chinois. Texte latin et traduction française publiés avec une introduction et des notes*, 1925, 128 pp.
- *Autour d'un bref secret de Clément VIII*, 1925, 128 pp.; new edition, 1930.
- *Les jésuites sous Aquiviva: La canonisation de saint Ignace; La compagnie et les Illuminés d'Espagne; Condamnation de Suarez; La crise du généralat; Imago primi saeculi (D'après des documents inédits extraits des archives du Vatican)*, 1927, 308 pp.
- *Les mensonges de Ribadeneyra. Des miracles et de la mort de saint Ignace. Sur le fléau de la "sollicitation" en Espagne au XVIe siècle*, Paris, 1929, 298 pp.

According to L. Koch, *Jesuiten-Lexicon*, Paderborn, 1934, II, 1501-1502, these pamphlets were distributed free of charge on a very large scale, even internationally, at the expense of a Parisian financier, a Jewish convert, who had at first subsidized missionaries but later came under other influences. According to their covers, however, these small volumes were sold at a relatively low price.

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interna documentada de la Compañía de Jesús, 2 vols., Madrid, 1913, he would even publish in part.

[11] On Guiraud see *Catholicisme*, 419-420.

[12] Without drawing on Boulin, I once devoted a short study to von Pastor: *Ludwig von Pastor et l'histoire du jansénisme à ses débuts*, in *Mededelingen van het Nederlands historisch Instituut*, 35 (1971), 14-43, reprinted in my *Jansenistica minora*, XII, fasc. 103.

[13] On Ferdinand Mourret, a Sulpician and liberal Catholic, see *Catholicisme*, IX, 812-813.

[14] On these Jesuits see L. Koch, *Jesuiten-Lexicon*, Paderborn, 1934.

We shall not concern ourselves further with these pamphlets. Let us merely note that they were topical at the time, often provoked by recent publications which, in Paul's judgment (and that of others), disregarded true history. Paul therefore had at least the merit of reopening problems that had been presented as settled. Yet by continually putting his finger on open wounds, he increased the number of his adversaries. Combative by nature, however, he did not seem to fear or avoid them.[15]

Retired

Around 1930 Paul laid down his arms. Was he compelled to do so? On 29 December 1929, writing to his bishop (I quote de Moreau):

> "… The disarmed combatant yields, at the evening of his life, with this noble testimony: 'Thank God, I have nothing to reproach myself with regarding the correctness of my priestly life … I have never done anything for money, positions, or favor. At the hour when God alone remains to me, I rejoice, on the contrary, that from this hard service I have not gained even a peaceful retirement.' "

Indeed, early in 1930, Paul, suffering from rheumatism and heart attacks, retired to Moussey, near Troyes; but even there he did not manage to lay down his lively pen completely. With imprudence? Certainly with unpleasant consequences.

In 1931, Jean Rivière,[16] professor of theology at Strasbourg and on his way to becoming famous, considered himself offended by an article which Paul, under his old pseudonym Duguet, had just published in the *Revue internationale des Sociétés secrètes* (a strongly Catholic review founded by Msgr. Jouin), and lodged a complaint for defamation with the Bishop of Troyes. The bishop, annoyed, wanted to bring in the nuncio. At once Paul recovered his youthful combativeness. On 17 November 1931 he informed his bishop:

> "… I shall appeal, if necessary, all the way to the Holy Office, for at least this fact is established: I defended my thesis under Pius X, in a loud and intelligible voice, in the sight and with the knowledge of the great Pontiff, and not without encouragement, at a time when today's so-called authorized and overly touchy interpreters, who claim to impose their monopoly on us, were keeping out of sight … Several of my friends would not be displeased to find themselves compelled, in order to defend me, to publish a certain number of documents which I had thought would be buried with me forever in my retirement. To say everything, finally, I am not myself certain that I would not find, for my part, a certain pleasure in returning to this smell of battle … If I am more or less forbidden to speak, I am still capable of setting fairly curious memoirs against even a doctor of Toulouse (now a professor at Strasbourg) … My respectful silence today prejudges nothing about my inner fidelity to old convictions. I am appalled by the increasingly rapid and decisive course that religious affairs are taking day by day in

[15] In his successive pamphlets Récalde sometimes answers his critics in passing; for example, in *Une victime des jésuites, saint Joseph de Calasanz*, Paris, 1922, he addresses at some length Fr. Enrico Rosa, S.J., director of *La Civiltà cattolica* (pp. 7-15), paying him back in kind: "… Your astonishing article in *La Civiltà cattolica*, dated 4 March, a masterpiece of another genre and another spirit, leaves far behind it the few 'peremptory replies' that some of your confreres have already made to us and which we had intended to offer as a treat to our readers … In the same tone, for twenty pages, in vehement Italian that defies all courtesy, you review one by one each of our studies or re-editions of old texts. Obviously, all the trouble you have taken, this explosion of vexation or this excess of zeal, call for a reply …". As we can see, Paul is quick with the rapier!

[16] On this theologian (1878-1946), see *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, tables, III, 3910.

> Rome, in Paris, and even in Troyes. If I were permitted, I would protest with all my strength …".

But when the offended Strasbourg professor withdrew his complaint, Paul had no need to bring out his documents. Were they in fact buried with him at Moussey on 6 July 1933, when, two days earlier, "after a long illness and the devout reception of the sacraments," the combative writer had just died there, probably already forgotten by an ungrateful, if not hostile, world?[17]

[17] *La Revue catholique* (of the Diocese of Troyes) announced the death without another word. Daniel Rops, the distinguished historian, in his work *Un combat pour Dieu*, 1963, p. 367, mentions Paul as "a dubious figure, a priest suspended by his bishop …". Only around 1969, thanks to Monsieur S. de Moreau, chancellor of the bishopric, could the members from Troyes of the *Société archéologique* hear (but, as far as I know, not read) a cautious account of the career of this parish priest, novelist, and historian, who certainly deserves better. History, too, can be ungrateful.